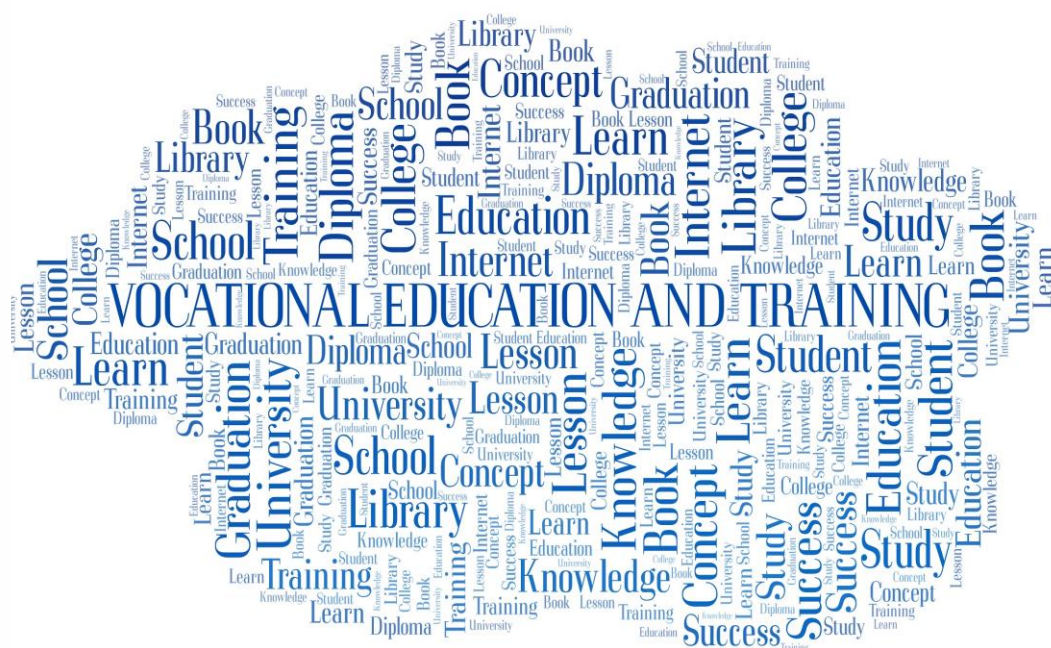


## Students Enrolled in Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) Offshore

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***For further information, please visit the website [www.internationaleducation.gov.au](http://www.internationaleducation.gov.au) or [www.education.gov.au](http://www.education.gov.au).***

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## Acronyms

ACCVETP	Australian China Chongqing TVET Project
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACPET	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
APTC	Australia-Pacific Technical College
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
CEAIE	Chinese Education Association for International Exchange
ChAFTA	China–Australia Free Trade Agreement
DET	Department of Education and Training
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NIES	National Institute of Education Sciences
MoE	Ministry of Education
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TDA	TAFE Directors Australia
TNE	Transnational Education
TVA	Total VET Activity
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTI	Victorian Training International

## Executive Summary

Little is currently known about the student experience of Australian vocational education and training (VET) offshore. This research project, commissioned under the Australian Government's *National Strategy for International Education 2025*, takes important first steps towards building an evidence base to inform policy, practice and research.

Supported by an analysis of Total VET Activity (TVA) data on overseas VET enrolments, the research findings are based on: (1) analysis of quantitative data collected through the first ever global survey of students enrolled in Australian VET courses overseas; and (2) analysis of qualitative data collected through a series of focus groups with students located in two Chinese provinces.

### Key findings

#### **Australian VET offshore includes a diverse mix of partnerships and delivery models**

There are a number of delivery models that exist to deliver Australian training overseas. The majority of programs are delivered through partnering arrangements on a fee-for-service basis. Under this arrangement, the Australian registered training organisations (RTOs) form partnerships with an overseas education institution (e.g. a college or university) to deliver a qualification accredited under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

The Australian VET program is then contextualised to the offshore environment. This process includes consideration of labour market demand, government priorities and pathway options among a range of other factors. Students are typically then enrolled in, and graduate with, both the local and the Australian qualification.

#### **Programs are clustered around a core set of providers and qualifications covering both broad and specialist training**

There were around 35,000 program enrolments offshore in 2017. This equates to 1 per cent of the 3.4m program enrolments recorded across the Australian training system. Just nine programs make up one-third of all program enrolments. The remaining two-thirds is made up of around 300 programs, mainly at Diploma, Certificate IV and Certificate III levels.

#### **The predominant student profile are Chinese young adults with an international outlook but also includes students from over 40 other countries**

China accounts for two-thirds of total program enrolments. A further 43 countries account for the remaining one-third. More specifically, around half of the entire student population are Chinese-born students enrolled in programs with Victorian TAFE providers. Three-quarters of program enrolments are under 25 years of age and the gender balance is almost equal. Teachers and administrators in China observed that students enrolled in international programs tend to: (1) have a more global perspective than their peers; (2) be smart, motivated, creative and entrepreneurial; and (3) have great potential for further growth.

#### **The Chinese context is complex and dynamic**

In China, Sino-Foreign Joint Programs are generally a well-regarded option for students. These include programs from Australia, Canada, the UK, Germany and a number of other English-speaking countries. In addition to increasing global competition, in recent years there has been a tightening of government regulations on foreign providers offering programs in China. This has contributed to a downturn in VET enrolments delivered by Australian providers offshore.

Courses delivered in China that include foreign content are often referred to locally as an 'international major' (a course with an international component) and can be up to three or four times as expensive as the local qualifications. This can make the decision to enrol in these programs a considerable investment for students and their families.

## Most students are enrolled in international programs because their school or college recommended it to them

Two-thirds of students had enrolled in an international major (i.e. with Australian content) because their school or college recommended it. One student explained that *“They [the college in China] said that you could get an opportunity to study in Australia on the internet. And they also said that with this kind of diploma, there will be better opportunities for future employment”*. Unsurprisingly, parent(s) or family members were rated highly by students as playing an important role in their choice of course.

## Students use and trust information but are looking for more information on outcomes and pathways

Students rated highly the importance of trusted information about the course, particularly in the areas of: (1) costs and affordability; (2) language of instruction (where English is highly desirable); (3) outcomes (i.e. employment); and (4) pathways into higher level qualifications. Information on cost is also important. Although, as one student explained, high cost courses can be seen as an indicator of quality by students and families: *“My dad saw that this is the most expensive course and asked me to choose this one”*. Some information gaps were also identified, notably where students stated that they were seeking more information on pathways into higher level qualifications at home and overseas after they complete their course. One student observed that *“...we do not have much information about the schools such as school professors, facilities and school conditions in Australia”*.

## Students identified a set of benefits to completing an international VET course at home

The results indicate that these students are most certain that their course: (1) Provides them with **English language skills that make them more employable**; (2) Gives them **access to foreign cultures**; and (3) **Provides more opportunities to work overseas**.

Students believe the Chinese qualification is well-regarded by Chinese industry and the Australian qualification is recognised worldwide. As one student explained: *“There are two certificates at the end. We are studying in this school, and our certificates are the same as those students who have been studying in Australia. So it saves a lot of money”*.

Students believe the international major provides an **opportunity to use and improve spoken and written English proficiency**. It also provides an opportunity to gain technical skills and knowledge in English. One student explained that: *“English is a universal language, our course has been taught in English. We will go to all kinds of international commercial trade networks in the future, so English will be very useful”*.

Students believe that an international qualification **creates a point-of-difference in an increasingly competitive job market, stating that** *“...we will have an advantage with finding a job both overseas and in China, and there will be some opportunities for overseas projects”*.

Some students see international qualifications as providing an opportunity to **learn about, and from, Australian and other foreign cultures**. One student stated that *“I chose this course because you can learn more about Australian culture”*. Another stated that *“After studying the cooperative education program, because of access to the foreign culture and the foreign technology, you will come out as a more qualified person”*.

Some students were pursuing the international program as a way of **creating a pathway into further education and training**, including into undergraduate degrees in China. One student stated that: *“Studying from diploma to bachelor’s degree will involve English... I will have an advantage over other students without English skills who want to study from diploma to bachelor’s degree”*.

Students identified a number of benefits to completing an international qualification:

- Graduate with **two qualifications** – one Australian and one from the local provider.
- Opportunities to **improve English-language** proficiency.
- An international qualification creates a **point-of-difference** in an increasingly competitive job market.
- Opportunities to learn about **foreign cultures** and international perspectives.
- **Pathways to further education and training** at home and overseas.
- Learning through a **different and distinctive approach to training**.
- Gain access to **systems and technologies** not available in local alternatives.

Some students spoke about the Australian approach to training being **‘broader’ than local alternatives, while also being specialised and practical**. On the difference between Australian and Chinese training courses, students in the international business major observed that: *“I was quite happy when I came here and found out it was a Chinese-Australian cooperative course. Because this is a Chinese-Australian cooperative course, you can learn more knowledge in the field of finance and economics. It will be much better than the usual accounting. The knowledge that we have learned will be broader and more useful”*. At a more practical level, students could identify specific opportunities relating to their development of skills and knowledge with foreign and international systems and software.

### **Post-training plans tend to focus on further education, training and employment options**

The three highest rated reasons for doing training were employment related: (1) **To get a job in my home country**; (2) **To get a better job or promotion**; and (3) **I wanted extra skills for my job**. Post-training plans also included aspirations to undertake **further education and training**, possibly an undergraduate degree. However, there are financial constraints on what opportunities are available, as explained by one student: *“I originally wanted to go overseas to study, but I found that my family's financial ability couldn't keep up with it. I would like to do the bachelor's degree first, then I still want to go overseas if I have another chance”*.

### **Most students would recommend their course to their peers**

Almost two-thirds are likely or very likely to recommend an Australian VET provider. However, their decision to recommend, or not, depends on the English language proficiency of their peers and their family circumstances (i.e. affordability). As one student explained: *“It should be based on the financial situation of their families. I would recommend that he study in this school, because learning from different perspectives, you may gain a lot”*.

### **Conclusions**

The project contributes a set of survey and focus group questionnaires as well as broadly representative results from one of the largest Australian providers of VET offshore. However, more work is required to continue building the evidence base, particularly in terms of understanding and communicating information about the post-training pathways and outcomes from completing an international VET program overseas, and more specifically, an *Australian* VET program overseas.

The capacity of this project to comprehensively profile Australian VET offshore was hampered by a lack of participation by providers. With greater participation, the research outputs can bring wider benefits by highlighting the success of the sector as a whole. ACER gratefully acknowledges the individuals and organisations who did participate with considerable enthusiasm. In particular, ACER wishes to acknowledge the National Institute of Education Sciences for partnering with ACER during the fieldwork in China. It is suggested that research into Australian VET offshore be preceded by ensuring the sector can first provide representative participation before committing to another project.



# 1. Introduction

The current *National Strategy for International Education 2025* includes a goal that focuses on 'Delivering the best possible student experience'. The Goal has three Actions:

- Action 2.1: Supporting students
- Action 2.2: Informing student choice
- Action 2.3: Preparing students for global engagement (DET, 2016a, p.15)

In July 2017, the Department of Education and Training engaged the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to undertake a research project titled '*Survey and Focus Groups of Offshore Vocational Education and Training (VET) Students*'. The project is positioned under the banner of the National Strategy and its focus on improving the student experience of offshore VET.

The overarching aim is to investigate the experiences of students undertaking VET programs delivered to offshore locations by Australian registered training organisations (RTOs) and their delivery partners in 2017-18.

The specific aims for the project are to:

- Provide an overview of the **demographics and experiences** of the in-scope students;
- Provide students with a **mechanism for sharing** their ideas, expectations and key elements of their offshore study experience;
- Be a mechanism to share '**good news**' stories for promotion; and
- Provide **evidence-based information** regarding students' experience across learning and support services to help improve consistency and quality of Australian VET programs delivered to offshore students.

## 1.1. A brief history of Australian VET offshore

Australian education providers have been 'early adopters' of transnational education by partnering with overseas institutions to deliver Australian qualifications offshore (Austrade, 2014). Under the Hawke Government, Australia's focus shifted from 'aid to trade' and towards contemporary models of transnational education. One of the first formal international education activities in VET began in the late 1980s with the hosting of international scholars in technical areas in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes (Tran & Dempsey, 2017).

Contemporary models of offshore VET have their origins in the Australian China Chongqing TVET Project between 2002 and 2007 (ACCVETP). ACCVETP began as a capacity-building project funded by the Chinese Government and Australian Government with municipal Government support. Its aim was to contribute to economic development of China and the region through developing a TVET system more responsive to the needs of industry. The program led to 5,120 students enrolled in ACCVETP courses and 1,120 teachers trained (Holden, 2015).

Enrolments have been in decline since 2009, due in large part to the Chinese Government tightening its regulation of the number and composition of foreign providers operating in China. There is also increasing global competition for the delivery of transnational education. Germany, the UK, Canada, Singapore and the USA, for example, each have active partnerships in China (Lawson, 2017).

The latest published Total VET activity (TVA) data shows around 35,000 program enrolments in overseas locations in 2017 (Figure 1.1). The majority, 88.1 per cent (NCVER, 2015), of offshore VET is delivered through this partnering model of delivery. More information on the models of VET delivery is included in Appendix B.

## 1.2. What we learn from the literature

A review of the research literature identified a set of relevant themes for this project:

1. There is a **lack of research literature on the experiences of students** enrolled in vocational education and training programs with a foreign institution;
2. Internationally, there is a **lack of standard and consistent definitions and terminology** relating to offshore VET programs;
3. The **push-pull factors** influencing 'onshore' international students may overlap with, but are distinct from, those influencing students enrolled in an international qualification 'offshore'; and
4. The motivations of students enrolling with foreign providers in their home country often involves: **(a) a comparison of local and foreign qualifications**; and **(b) the perceived benefits arising from completing one or both qualifications** (i.e. improved employability, improved English language proficiency).

A full literature review is included in Appendix A.

## 1.3. Methodology

In summary, the project methodology involved:

1. A multi-tiered **stakeholder engagement** strategy, both in Australia and in China.
2. **Engagement with the providers** – predominantly TAFE - estimated to account for around 90 per cent of offshore program enrolments in the 2017 Total VET Activity dataset.
3. A partnership with the **National Institute of Education Sciences (NIES)** for the fieldwork conducted in China.
4. A review of the **research literature** and desktop research into models of offshore VET.
5. The development and deployment of an **online survey questionnaire** administered through VET providers, their agents and partnering colleges.
6. A series of **focus groups in China** with 30 students in two provinces. Students signed consent forms to confirm their participation in the research.
7. **Analysis of secondary data** (Total VET Activity) and **primary analysis** of the survey and focus group data.
8. **Reporting** of results.



## 2. Who offshore VET students are and what they study

In summary, the results of this analysis of student demographics are:

1. The **gender balance** across the student population is almost equal.
2. Three-quarters of program enrolments are for students **under 25 years of age**.
3. **China** alone accounts for two-thirds of total program enrolments – 43 countries account for the remaining one-third.
4. Around half of the entire student population are **Chinese-born students enrolled in programs with Victorian TAFE providers**.
5. Almost 90 per cent of offshore enrolments are delivered by just **six types of provider** with Victorian TAFE having the largest share of enrolment.
6. 46 per cent of enrolments are at **Diploma** level or higher, with the remainder at Certificate IV (18%) and Certificate III (15%) levels.
7. Just **nine programs** make up one-third of all program enrolments – the remaining two-thirds is made up by almost 300 programs, mainly at Diploma, Certificate IV and Certificate III level

This section analyses the latest Total VET Activity (TVA) data to describe: (1) the demographics (age profile and gender); and (2) the providers and programs in which students are enrolled.

### 2.1. Demographics

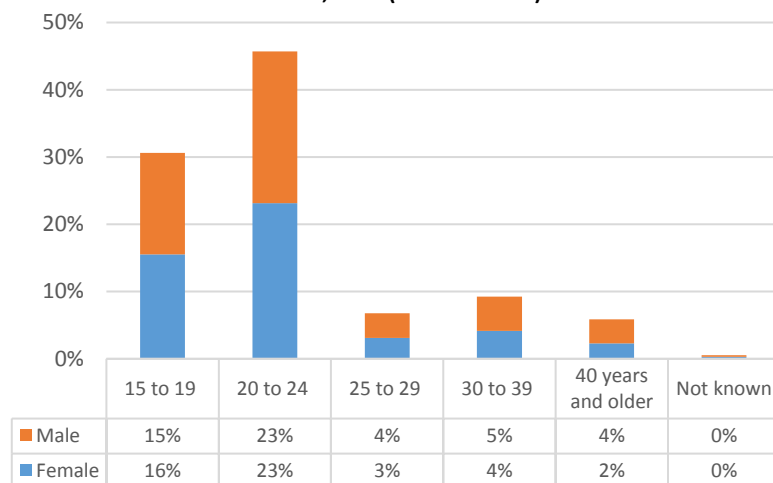
Overall, the gender balance is almost equal, with slightly more females than males (51:49). Over three-quarters of program enrolments are for students under 25 years of age – 46 per cent are 20-24 years old and 31 per cent are 15-19 years old (Figure 2.1). Program enrolments are recorded in around 44 different countries. One country, China, accounts for two-thirds of total program. The remaining 43 countries account for the remaining two-thirds.

In terms of country of delivery, after China, countries with the highest number of program enrolments are Kuwait (4.8%); Asia not further defined (4.6%); and United Arab Emirates (3%). The remaining countries each make up less than 2 per cent of the population – 32 of which each make up less than 1 per cent.

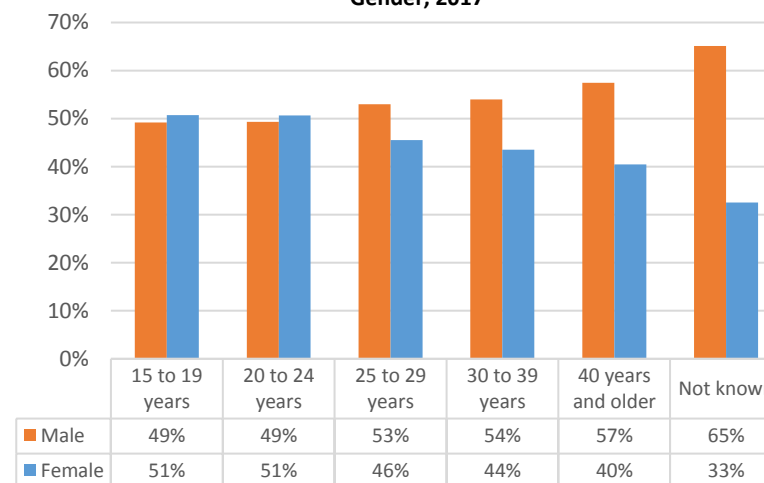
Around half of the entire student population are Chinese-born students' enrolled in programs with Victorian TAFE providers. The proportion of enrolments delivered in China varies by jurisdiction, ranging from 88 per cent in Victoria to 21 per cent in Queensland. The different composition of countries in Queensland is explained by its role in the Australia-Pacific Technical College across a number of Pacific Island Countries (Figure 2.3). Also noteworthy, is TAFEWA's comparatively high enrolments in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Mauritius (Figure 2.3).

## Demographics of offshore VET student population

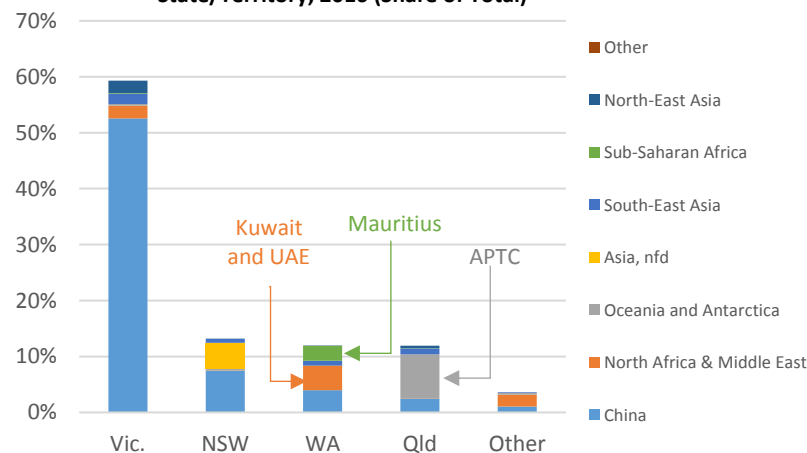
**Figure 2.1: Program Enrolments, by Age and Gender, 2017 (Share of Total)**



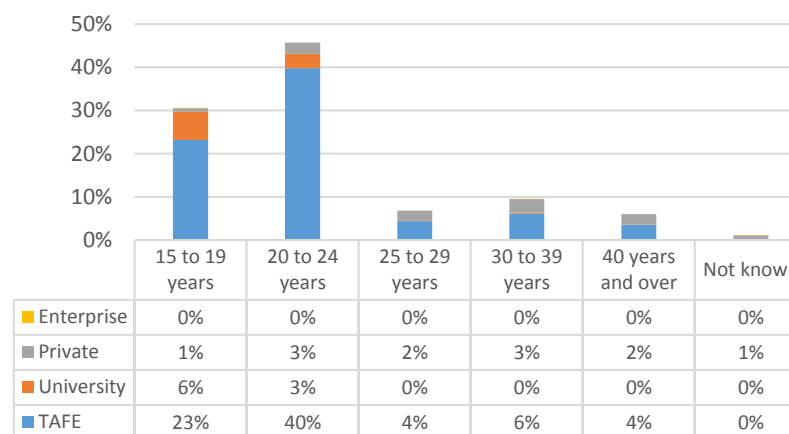
**Figure 2.2: Program Enrolments, by Age and Gender, 2017**



**Figure 2.3: Program Enrolments, by Country of Delivery and State/Territory, 2016 (Share of Total)**



**Figure 2.4: Program Enrolments, by Age and Provider Type, 2017 (Share of Total)**

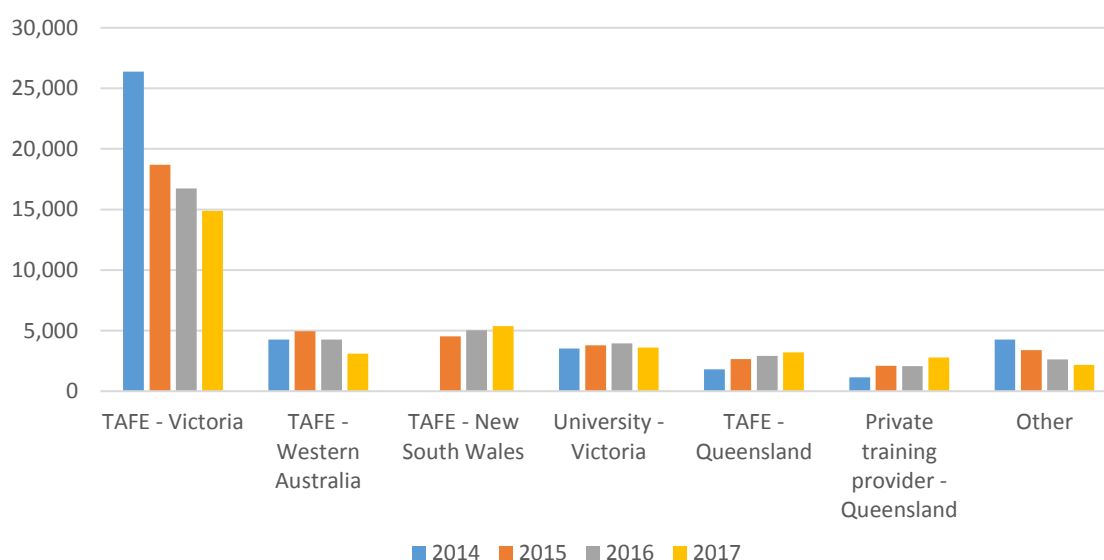


Data source: Total VET Activity data accessed via the VOCSTATS portal – 'Location of training delivery' is filtered to 'Overseas'

## 2.2. VET Programs

When compared to the 5,000 RTOs delivering training in Australia, the number of RTOs delivering Australian training *offshore* is comparatively small. In a presentation on *‘The role Victoria can play in the provision of vocational education and training in the Asian region and the experiences of NMIT [now Melbourne Polytechnic] – the opportunities and challenges’*, it was reported that ‘12 of the 31 providers [delivering VET offshore] were Victorian based and accounted for 75.3% of the total delivery. NMIT [now Melbourne Polytechnic] being responsible for 40% of the total delivery from all Australian providers’.

The latest data suggest that Australian offshore VET is predominantly delivered by Victorian TAFE Institutes (Figure 2.5). Almost 90 per cent of offshore enrolments are delivered by just six types of provider, namely: Victorian TAFE (39.9%); TAFENSW (14.4%); TAFE WA (8.3%); Victorian dual-sector universities (9.7%); TAFE Queensland (8.6%); and private training providers registered in Queensland (7.5%). The remaining combination of provider types – of which there are 11 – comprise less than six per cent of program enrolments (Figure 2.5).



**Figure 2.5: Program Enrolments in Overseas locations, by Jurisdiction**

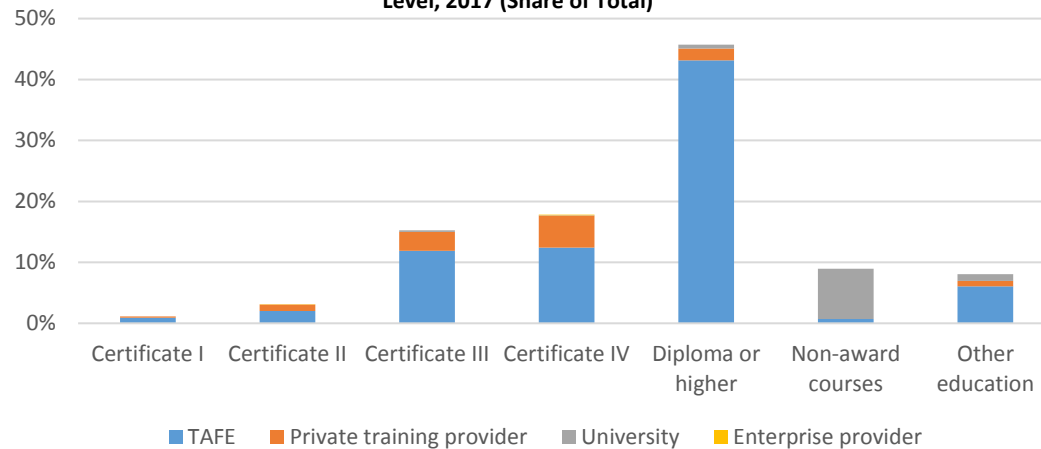
Source: Total VET Activity Data accessed via the NCVER VOCSTATS database | ‘Location of training delivery’ is filtered to ‘Overseas’

By level of qualification, 46 per cent of enrolments are at Diploma level or higher, with the remainder at Certificate IV (18%) and Certificate III (15%) levels (Figure 2.8). These data include Non-Award courses comprising of statements of attainment, bridging and enabling courses and account for nine per cent of program enrolments.

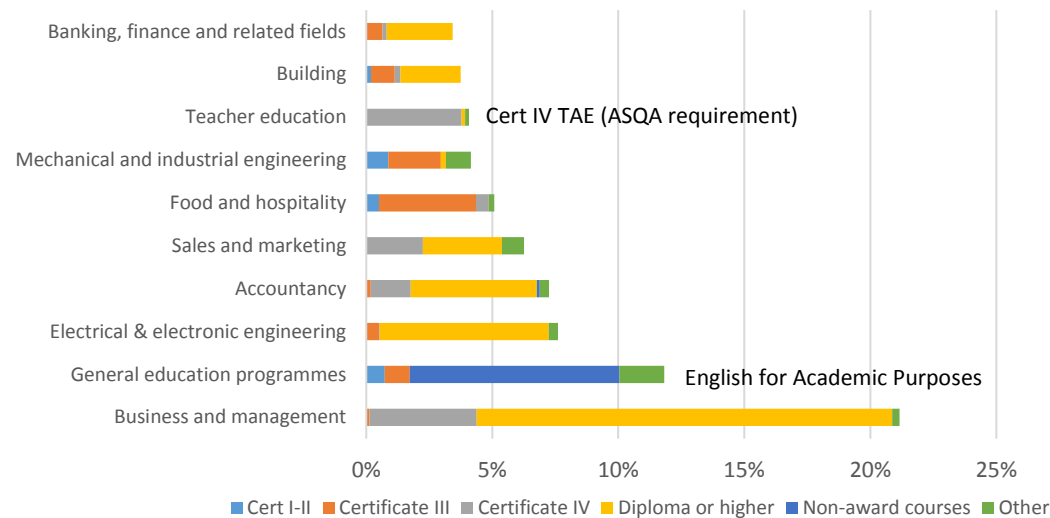
At course level, just nine programs make up one-third of all program enrolments (Figure 2.7). The highest-enrolling programs being: English for Academic Purposes (8.2%); Diploma of ESI (Electricity Supply Industry) - Power Systems (5.9%) and Diploma of International Business (4.3%) (Figure 2.9). The remaining two-thirds is made up by 292 programs, mainly at Diploma, Certificate IV and Certificate III level across a broad range of fields of education. At field of education level, the programs with the highest enrolments are: Business and management (21.2%); General education programmes (11.8%); and Electrical & electronic engineering (7.6%) (Figure 2.8).

## Summary of demographics

**Figure 2.6: Program Enrolments, by Qualification Level, 2017 (Share of Total)**

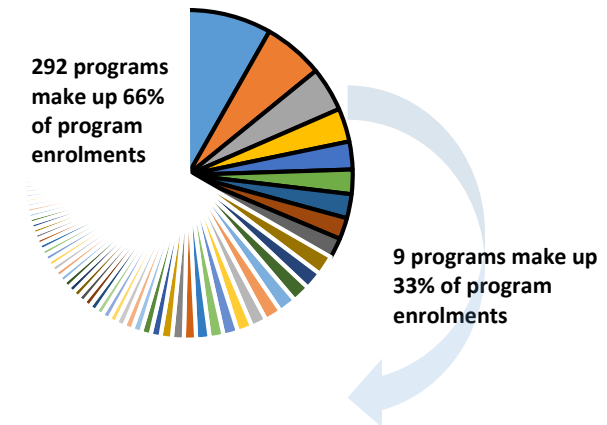


**Figure 2.8: Program Enrolments, by Field of Education, 2017 (Share of Total)**

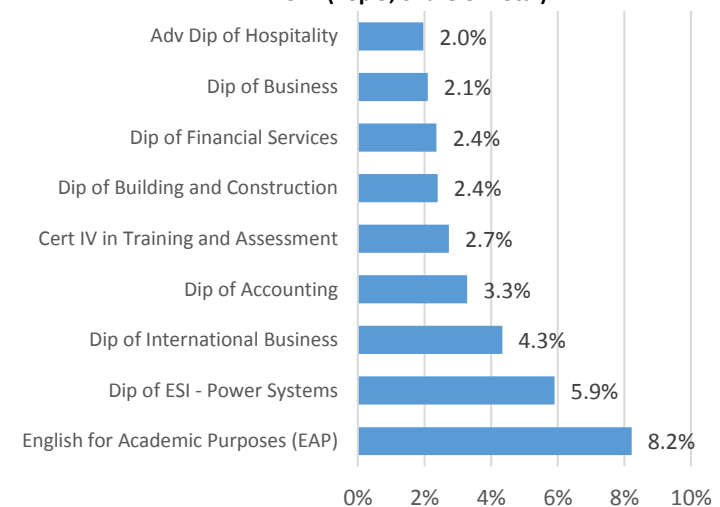


Highest enrolling Narrow Fields of Education

**Figure 2.7: Program Enrolments, by Type of Accreditation, 2017 (Share of Total)**



**Figure 2.9: Program Enrolments, by Type of Accreditation, 2017 (Top 9; Share of Total)**



Data source: Total VET Activity data accessed via the VOCSTATS portal – 'Location of training delivery' is filtered to 'Overseas'

### 3. What students at a large VET provider say

The experiences of students enrolled with a large VET provider are categorised into six themes:

1. **Contextual factors** (the institution, program type and student profile);
2. First **points of contact and engagement** with the course;
3. The role and relative importance of **information sources and influencers**;
4. **Information types and content**;
5. Reasons for doing the course, including the **anticipated benefits and advantages**; and
6. **Post-training plans** and the likelihood of students **recommending the course to others**.

#### 3.1. Contextual factors

A number of complex and historical factors have led to the program offerings and student profiles described within this case study. While it is not possible to provide an exhaustive account of what they are, the following factors were repeatedly identified by students, teachers, administrators and college leadership.

##### 3.1.1. About the Sino-Australian Joint Programs

In general, Sino [China]-Foreign Joint Programs are typically high-demand and well-regarded courses. According to the college administrators ACER spoke to, these courses can cost up to 3-4 times as much as local qualifications. For one college, a third-party satisfaction survey found that their employer's satisfaction rate is as high as 95 per cent. In addition to positive employment outcomes and employer feedback, it is widely believed that 'word of mouth' helps to strengthen the college's good reputation among students and their peers.

Chinese teaching staff require a Certificate IV training and assessment qualification as an ASQA requirement. These teachers may be responsible for around 80 per cent of the course delivery (in English, or bilingual). Staff from the Australian VET provider complete the other 20 percent. Teachers may travel to China for four to eight weeks depending on the nature of the course and the agreement made with the partner colleges.

For the most part, the colleges ACER visited offer courses that are popular and in high-demand among Chinese students, even without the attached international component. For example, at one college there are three courses out of 19 with international components, and in 2018 one-third of the total student applications are for those three courses.

##### 3.1.2. About the Students

The cost of studying overseas can be very high for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, making it unaffordable for many students and their families. When asked if there are any distinctive characteristics of students enrolling in the international programs, teachers and administrators stated that the students:

- Are willing and wish to receive education from foreign training organisation and may have a more global perspective than some of their peers;
- Are smart, motivated, creative and entrepreneurial; and
- Have great potential and ample space for further growth.



Teachers and administrators acknowledged that English-language proficiency was one of the main challenges, particularly early on in the course. In some cases, students enrolling in the joint programs may have preferred to have enrolled at university but did not receive the marks necessary for selection. A VET qualification is not as well-regarded in China as a university qualification, so some students prefer to complete a degree in China first, then consider further education in China or overseas. Some students reflected on their journey leading into their course:

*“There was a plan but sometimes it’s not a personal decision to make. There are family factors as well. I grew up in the countryside. There is a saying that the children in the countryside manage household affairs early.”*

*“My family thought that at least I need to find a job. I want to find at least one job to support myself. My family is not very rich, so I have to earn my own money to support myself.”*

*“I was not enthusiastic when I chose this course, rather I was influenced by family factors.”*

### 3.2. How students first heard about the course

A number of individuals and organisations offer information and advice to prospective students. This information may include advice from those at home and within their social group, including parents, family and friends. It may also include teachers and advisors at their high school or once they arrive at the college.

To better understand who these influencers are and the role that they play, students were asked how they first found out about the course. Almost two-thirds responded that they first heard about the course because their school or college recommended it to them (Figure 3.1). Another 13 per cent found the course by searching online.

*“They said that you could get an opportunity to study in Australia on the internet. And they also said that with this kind of diploma, there will be better opportunities for future employment.”*

*“I learned that the course was taught all in English from the internet. I found a teacher from this school in a chat group, then I added his WeChat. I asked him some detailed questions about this course, for example, would this course be taught all in English, certificates after graduation and more questions. He explained them to me.”*

Around 10 per cent found the course because family recommended it to them.

*“This major was recommended to me by my family and friends. They have friends working in the field of accounting. Nowadays, there is high demand in the accounting field for people who know English, so my parents recommend this major to me.”*

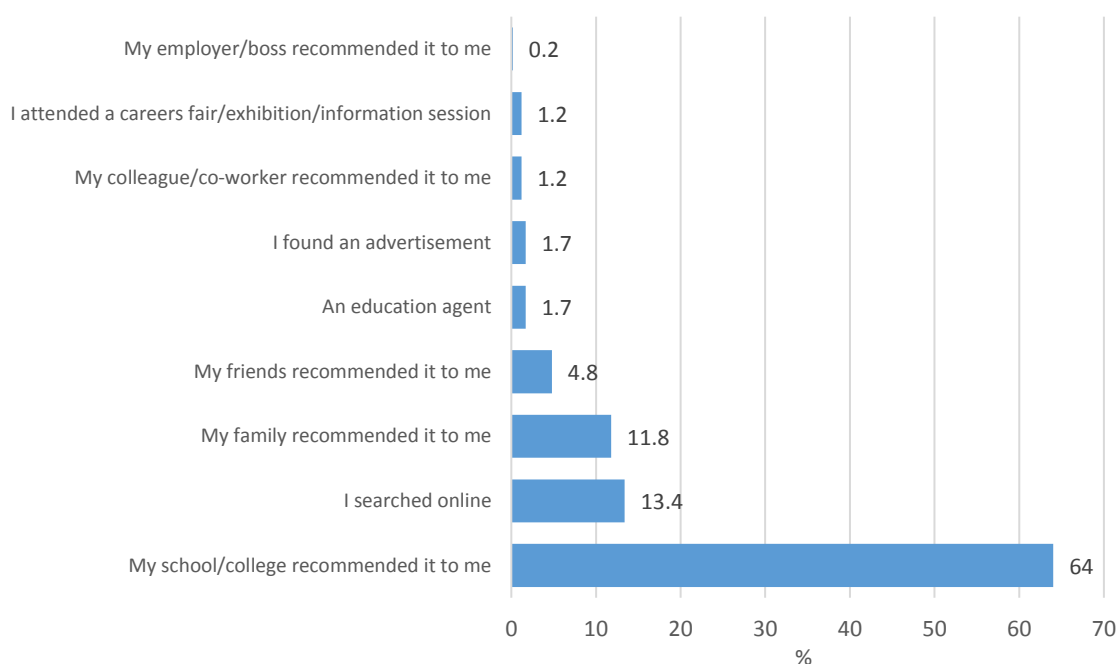
*“I was with my family when we saw a poster about this course. I had a discussion with my family, and because this is a Chinese and Australian cooperation course, I chose to come here and learn about the course.”*

The remaining methods of hearing about the course came from recommendations from friends (4.8%); an education agent (1.7%); and an advertisement (1.7%).



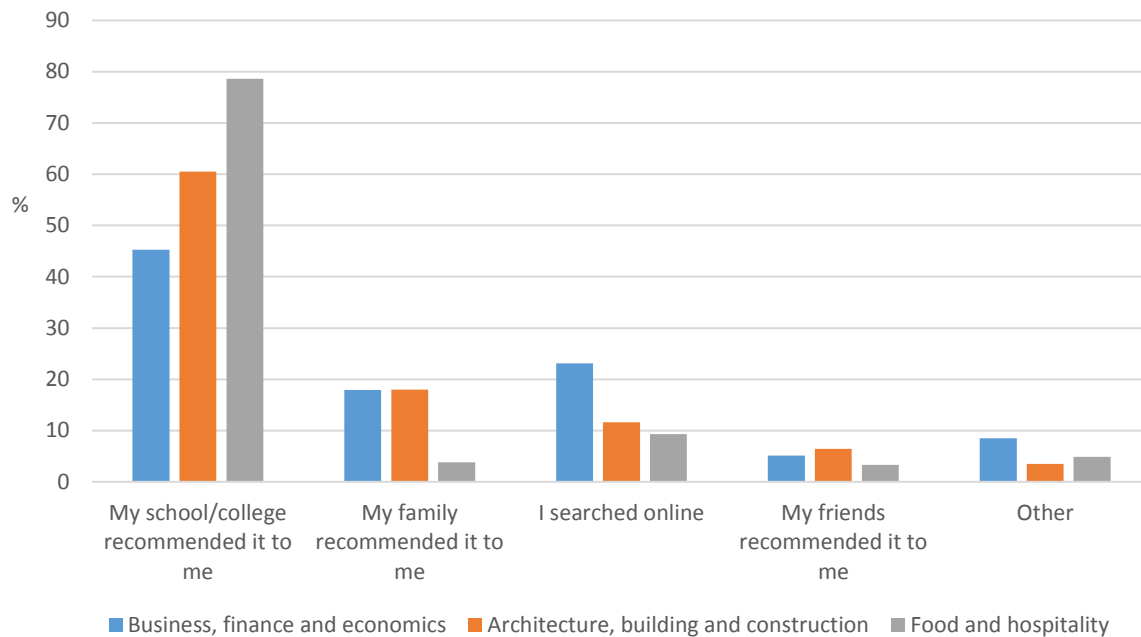
“Yes, when I applied for this major at the beginning, I also wanted to receive more education from foreign countries. From different perspectives, I may have more understanding. Then I also hope to go overseas for an internship for a period of time. To learn more about different aspects of the construction industry.”

Student A (Male, 18-24 years old, not employed) is enrolled in a building and construction major in Sichuan Province that leads to an Australian Diploma. He found out about the Australian course because his school/college recommended it to him. He is doing the course to improve his general education skills.



**Figure 3.1: How did you first find out about this course?**  
(n = 516)

While there is little difference across most fields of education, students enrolled in food and hospitality courses were more likely to have searched online than their peers in other courses. Those enrolled in business, finance and economics courses were more likely to have had the course recommended to them by the school or college (Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2: How did you first find out about this course? (Field of Education)**

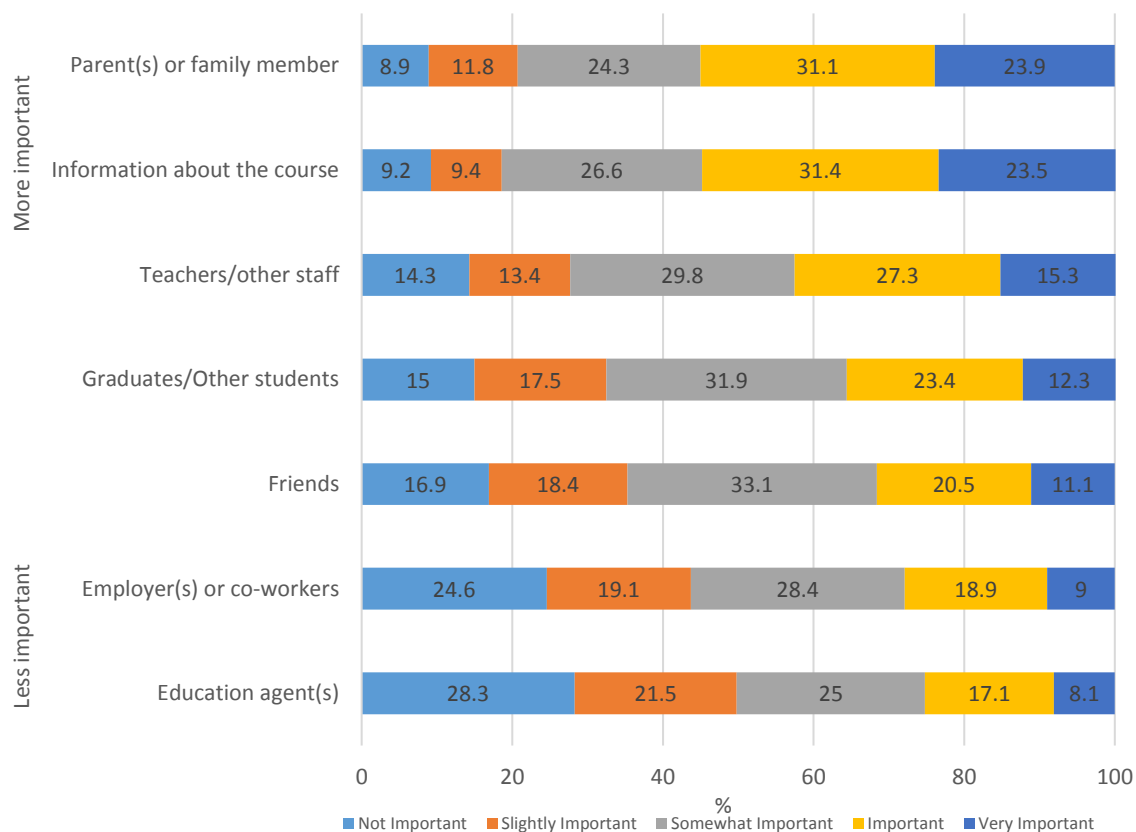
(n = 471)

### 3.3. The role and importance of influencers

Students were asked about the importance of individuals and groups to their decision-making. The factors more likely to be rated as either ‘very important’ or ‘important’ were: (1) Parent(s) or family members (55%); (2) Information about the course (54.9%); and (3) Teachers/other staff (42.6%). The factors more likely to be rated as ‘not important’ were: (1) Education agents (28.3%); (2) Employer(s) or co-workers (24.6%); and (3) Friends (16.9%).

In the focus groups, students revealed that the important role of parents is often related to family connections with a given industry or occupation area. For example, connections into the engineering and architecture industry among students enrolled in a Diploma of Building and Construction.

*“My dad said that this is a Chinese-Australian cooperative course when I was choosing a major. You can go overseas to study in the third year. My dad wanted me to choose this major because he wants me to go overseas. He wants me to do further study overseas, so I listened to him and chose this major.”*



**Figure 3.3: How important were the following in your decision to do this training course?**  
(n = 527)

### 3.4. Information sources and content

Course information focused on a set of key areas of interest among students: (1) costs and affordability; (2) language of instruction (i.e. English); (3) outcomes (i.e. employment); and (4) pathways into higher level qualifications.

As mentioned above, these joint international courses can be 3-4 times as expensive as local options. On the subject of **costs and affordability**, student typically accessed information in the course brochure to understand the tuition fee schedule:

*“The Administration brochure only provided the information about tuition fees, and it also mentioned that this is a Chinese-Australian cooperative course. This is what I saw on it. For the rest of the information, I went to the school on my own and asked about it.”*

*“The cost was also a consideration, and another aspect to consider was the career direction and what are we going to do. After also considering whether I would like it or not and be able to stick to it, I chose this major.”*

*“You pay the most expensive fee, then you should learn the most.”*

*“I also went through the Administration brochure and found this course and another course of business English. I personally preferred this International business major, and my parents felt that my English is good. My dad saw that this is the most expensive course and asked me to choose this one.”*

On the topic of language of instruction, there was an interest in identifying courses taught in English. Students were also interested in finding information about the qualification and employment outcomes from the training. They were particularly attracted to the course by information about dual certification and improving employment opportunities. Finally, students were interested in knowing about the opportunities for further education and training and what level of recognition the Australian qualification will afford them into university level courses in China or elsewhere.

### 3.5. Reasons for doing training – benefits and advantages

In the online survey, students were asked about the benefits and advantages of undertaking their course. Respondents were most in agreement that:

- 'Being able to **communicate in English** makes me more employable' (83.2% agree);
- 'Doing this course means I can **experience a different culture** through visiting teachers' (79.7% agree);
- 'Doing this course opens up **more opportunities to study or work overseas**' (77.6% agree).

As shown in Figure 3.4, students were less sure – but did not disagree - that:

- 'The **Australian training organisation** teaching my course is well-regarded' (57.7% disagree);
- '**Australian qualifications** are well-regarded (57.8% agree);
- '**International qualifications** are well-regarded' (62.7% agree).

While only representing a small share of responses, students were most consistently in disagreement with the statements that 'It costs less to study at home than to study overseas' (16% disagree) and 'Doing this course means I can access new social networks and friendships (15.7% disagree).

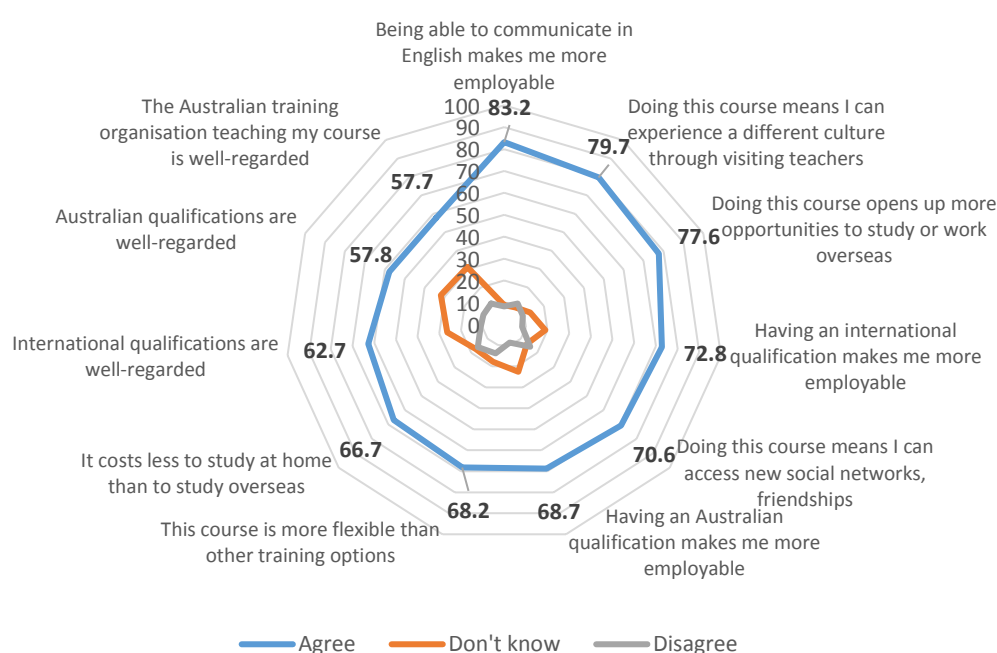


Figure 3.4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(n = 527)

For the qualitative data gathered in the student focus groups, responses were coded into seven main themes:

1. Graduate with two qualifications – one Australian and one Chinese;
2. Opportunities to improve English-language proficiency;
3. An international qualification creates a point-of-difference in an increasingly competitive job market;
4. Opportunities to learn about foreign cultures and international perspectives;
5. Pathways to further education and training in China and overseas;
6. Learning through a different and distinctive approach to training; and
7. Access to systems and technologies not available in local alternatives

#### 3.5.1. Graduate with two qualifications – one Australian and one Chinese

Students perceive that they will have better employment prospects in China and overseas because they will complete their training with an Australian qualification and a Chinese qualification. They believe the Chinese qualification is well-regarded by Chinese industry and the Australian qualification is recognised worldwide.

*“I knew about this course through the internet. I saw this Chinese-Australian cooperative international business course in this school when I applied for schools. I was planning to study the Chinese international business at first, then later I found out that there was a Chinese-Australian cooperative course and there will be two certificates at the end. So I chose this one.”*

*“Because there are two certificates at the end. We are studying in this school, and our certificates are the same as those students who have been studying in Australia. So it saves a lot of money.”*

*“There was a process chart...You could see that you will get two certificates, one each from the Australian and Chinese sides after graduation.”*

“There are two certificates at the end. We are studying in this school, and our certificates are the same as those students who have been studying in Australia. So it saves a lot of money. I had the idea of going overseas, to get used to the western teaching curriculum, and then decide whether to do further study in Australia or not. After we finish studying this course, if we want to choose some interconnected majors from Australia, our course will give us some credit. This means that to take the same degree, the students will take longer than the students who studied this course. I prefer the two areas of international business major and English.

There is certainly some improvement [in my English skills]. Compared with other majors that do not have English teaching at all, it there is certainly some improvement. Because this course is all in English, we needed to spend more time to understand what the content really means. We learned something during the process.

There is certainly a difference. Two different education systems, so they are all different. For example, the things they teach, the way they teach, the way of thinking. We have some advantage compared to other students in China because we can get to know both sides. The Chinese teachers teach us the foreign course, and the teacher has their own system. I felt that our course provides advantages compared to others after we studied this course.

Student B (Male, 18-24 years old, not employed) is enrolled in an international business major in Guangdong Province that leads to an Australian Diploma. Before he started the course, he considered doing a course with a UK education institution. He found out about the Australian course because his school/college recommended it to him. He is doing the course to improve his general education skills.



### 3.5.2. Opportunities to improve English-language proficiency

Students identified two benefits to participating in, and completing, an Australian qualification. Firstly, they believe it provides an opportunity to use and improve spoken and written English proficiency. Secondly, they believe it provides an opportunity to gain technical skills and knowledge in English.

*“English is a universal language, our course has been taught in English. We will go to all kinds of international commercial trade networks in the future, so English will be very useful. I think by letting us use the foreign language teaching environment in the first place, that would be better for us to understand English in the future.”*

*“After we have finished this course, we will know more about English vocabulary in the field of construction than other students.”*

*“...you certainly had to concentrate harder when listening. You would understand more if they taught in Chinese. We definitely had to listen more closely to the teacher, so our ability to handle English got better.”*

*“... the most direct benefit is [that you] improve your oral English, listening and speaking ability.”*

*“The major knowledge and technical terminology that they have been studying in the regular international business course are only in Chinese. We study the course in English, but they are not. This means we will know much more international business technical terminology than them, and it will be easier for us to find a job in the foreign trade field.”*

*“Because this course is all in English, we needed to spend more time to understand what the content really means. We learned something during the process.”*

*Facilitator: You didn't know that this was a Chinese-Australian course. You just chose this major.*

*Student: Yes.*

*Facilitator: What if you had known that?*

*Student: I probably wouldn't have chosen it.*

*Facilitator: Why? Did you find English was more stressful?*

*Student: Yes, because English has been really stressful for me. First, I am afraid that I can't keep up if I study this major in English. Second, I am afraid that if I can't keep up, then I won't be learning anything, so it will just be a waste of time.*

*Facilitator: You are in your second year now, how do you feel now? Has your English improved in the past year?*

*Student: Yes, now when I see some words that I have seen before, I can probably know what they mean. After learning for a while, you will naturally become more proficient.*

Student C (Female, 18-24 years old, employed part-time) is enrolled in an international business major in Guangdong Province that leads to an Australian Diploma. Before she started the course, she did not know that at least part of it would be taught by an Australian training organisation. She had previously considered enrolling with a course delivered through a Canadian training provider. She found out about the Australian course because his school/college recommended it to him. The main reason she is doing the training course to get a job in her home country of China.



### 3.5.3. An international qualification creates a point-of-difference in an increasingly competitive job market

There is a sense of optimism among the students ACER spoke with around employment prospects in China, particularly in the occupations in which they are enrolled (i.e. building and construction and international business). While job prospects may be positive, students understand that new entrants are looking for ways to set themselves apart and be distinctive.

*“We will have an advantage with finding a job both overseas and in China, and there will be some opportunities for overseas projects.”*

*“I was also optimistic about this industry at that time. I believed that this industry provided more opportunities in the current international situation, so I made some preparations for myself for the future.”*

“About the job opportunities, even without them saying anything, we knew that if we had received an education from a western institution, we would have a head start over students who did not choose the mixed language course.

I have a family member who works part-time in a construction company. He told me that I should study at Sichuan construction institute, and it is best to choose some majors that allow me to communicate with foreigners.

In this part of the course we study, a large percentage of the course would be taught by western institutions that cooperate with China to teach us. When I applied for this major at the beginning, I also wanted to receive more education from foreign countries. From different perspectives, I may have more understanding. Then I also hope to go overseas for an internship for a period of time. To learn more about different aspects of the construction industry.

The main reason for choosing this school, is because the school provides this major. The major is very well regarded and will provide strong qualifications. It provides a strong guarantee of finding a job, both in China and overseas.

The major of construction engineering technology is relatively comprehensive and covers a wide range of areas. For example, the Engineering specialty major (China UK cooperation) in our school, and other majors, specialise in one aspect, but we have a wider understanding in every aspect. There will be no shortage of construction knowledge or the development of a specific design.

We have learned about some software technology and some information in this course that is ahead of the Chinese construction technology, then maybe I will have certain advantages with this aspect of knowledge when looking for a job. I would recommend that he study in this school, because learning from different perspectives, you may gain a lot.”

Student D (Male, 18-24 years old, not employed) is enrolled in a building and construction major in Sichuan Province that leads to an Australian Diploma. He found out about the Australian course because his college/school recommended it to him. The main reason he is doing the course is to improve his general education skills.



#### 3.5.4. Opportunities to learn about foreign cultures and international perspectives

These students enrolled with these particular colleges appear to have an interest in foreign cultures and gaining an international or global perspective as part of their post-school education. They see these international qualifications as providing an opportunity to learn about, and from, Australian and other foreign cultures. They believe this can occur through the visiting teachers but also through taking a more active interest in the host country of the international qualification.

*“I choose this course because you can learn more about Australian culture.”*

*“Comparing the traditional education with the Chinese-Australian cooperation education, they are different. After studying the cooperative education program, because of access to the foreign culture and the foreign technology, you will come out as a more qualified person.”*



*Facilitator: You chose this course because you can learn more about Australian culture. As you said before, you are really looking forward after this three years course, to go to Australia and do further study. Is that correct?*

Student: Yes, I want to go to RMIT.

*Facilitator: RMIT. You want to go to university.*

Student: I want to learn about art design from the Australian side, about the architectural design.

*Facilitator: You are using this course as a base to improve your English. Then you can go to Australia in three years.*

Student: Yes, I want to first try the education style and course teaching style of foreign teachers here in China to see if I can adapt to it.



Student E (Male, 18-24 years old, not employed) is enrolled in a building and construction major in Sichuan Province that leads to an Australian Diploma. He found out about the Australian course because a family recommended it to him. The main reason he is doing the course is to improve his general education skills.

### 3.5.5. Pathways to further education and training in China and overseas

Some students were pursuing the international program as a way of creating a pathway into further education and training, including into undergraduate degrees in China. They believe that the course will assist with improving their English-language proficiency to a point where they can perform better at undergraduate level, particularly in majors that have an international or global perspective.

*"Studying from diploma to bachelor's degree will involve English. I have been learning a course that is taught all in English, so my English will improve a lot. I will have an advantage over other students without English skills who want to study from diploma to bachelor's degree."*

*"It was a friend of my parents who suggested to me that I study this major. Because at that time my parents were willing to let me go overseas to study, and the country that we had chosen was Australia. Later on we heard that after three years study in this college, if our grades are good enough then we can go to Australia to apply for the school over there."*

### 3.5.6. Learning through a different and distinctive approach to training

Students could identify benefits in learning through a different style of training and assessment than they were previously used to – either at school or in other courses they had undertaken or were undertaking at college. They perceived the Australian competency-based approach to training approach to be 'broader' than local alternatives, while also being specialised and practical. Students were asked what they saw as being the main differences between their Australian course and local courses available to them in China. Students and teachers suggested that international courses (Australian) tend to provide a wide range of knowledge in broader contexts, and Chinese courses, on the other hand, provide in-depth knowledge in specific areas.

*“Those exams in China are mostly for getting a qualification, but they don't pay attention to those aspects that are more practical. We are learning now not only to cope with exams, but to master a skill that is practical.”*

*“I was quite happy when I came here and found out it was a Chinese-Australian cooperative course. Because this is a Chinese-Australian cooperative course, you can learn more knowledge in the field of finance and economics. It will be much better than the usual accounting. The knowledge that we have learned will be broader and more useful.”*

*“The difference is the course is fundamentally different. We learn more things than they do, and we learn a broader and more detailed type of accounting. That means everyone's position will be different in the future. If you are learning the normal accounting major, you will more likely go in to an accounting, or cashier position that is a low management career. If you are learning Chinese-Australian cooperative course, you will be more in the direction of the higher management level, such as the head of accounting, finance director or various areas. I think it is the essential difference.”*

*“There is certainly a difference [between the Australian and Chinese course]. Two different education systems, so they are all different. For example, the things they teach, the way they teach, the way of thinking. We have some advantage compared to other students in China because we can get to know both sides. The Chinese teachers teach us the foreign course, and the teacher has their own system. I felt that our course provides advantages compared to others after we studied this course.”*

### 3.5.7. Access to systems and technologies not available in local alternatives

At a more practical level, students could identify specific opportunities relating to their development of skills and knowledge with foreign and international systems and software. They believed that enrolling in the international program would provide the advantage of having accessed and developed some level of proficiency in internationally recognised and used software.

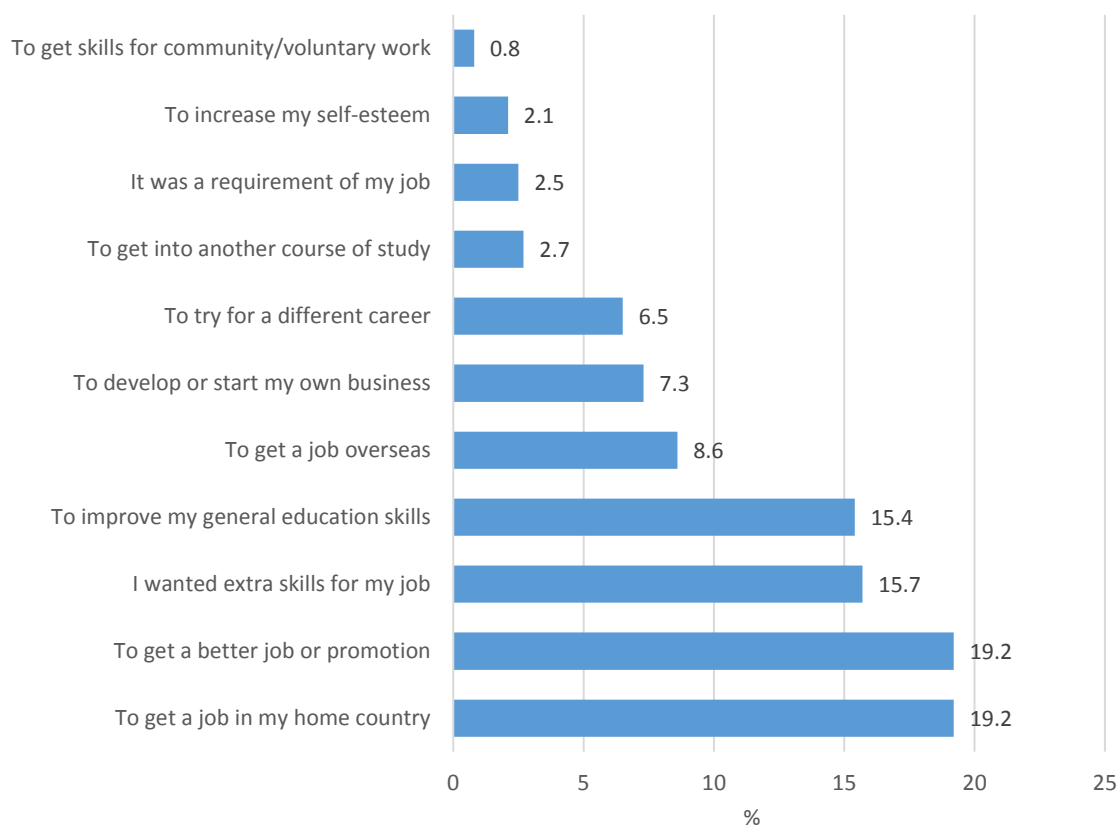
*“First, we learned SCD is not used in China, and SCD is commonly used internationally. Even though SCD is not currently used in China, China will keep up with the international standard, so this software will certainly be used in the future.”*

*“Because we have learned about some software technology and some information in this course that is ahead of the Chinese construction technology, then maybe I will have certain advantages with this aspect of knowledge when looking for a job.”*

## 3.6. Post-training plans

For the online survey, students were asked about their main reasons for doing a VET course. The three highest rated responses were employment related: (1) ‘To get a job in my home country’ (19.2%); (2) ‘To get a better job or promotion’ (19.2%); and (3) ‘I wanted extra skills for my job’ (15.7%) (Figure 3.5).

The fourth highest rated response was ‘to improve my general education skills’ (15.4) which was understood by students to include opportunities to improve their oral and written English skills. Less than ten per cent responded that they were enrolled in the training course ‘to get a job overseas’ (8.6%). As one student explained, their decision to enrol may not be traced to an ‘active’ choice. Instead, *“...it may be because of a kind of fate. I got to know many schools. I don't know why I preferred this school”*.



**Figure 3.5: What is the main reason you are doing this training course?**

(n = 521)

There appear to be two kinds of post-training plans that students are most interested in pursuing: (1) to undertake further education and training at home, possibly an undergraduate degree; and (2) go direct into employment.

*"I originally wanted to go overseas to study, but I found that my family's financial ability couldn't keep up with it. I would like to do the bachelor's degree first, then I still want to go overseas if I have another chance."*

*"I am studying from diploma to bachelor's degree in this college already. I recently started planning to study diploma to bachelor's degree in the university later on. I think bachelor's degree is very important now. There is certainly a difference between the basic wage of students with a diploma compared to [those with a] bachelor's degree."*

*"I will still look for a job in China. I thought the biggest benefit to me from this course would be learning the knowledge from the two areas of finance and economics. It could provide a certain benefit for me if I want to start a business. Also, it will help when we apply for those foreign trade enterprises, especially Chinese-Australian cooperative enterprises."*

The prospect of moving overseas to study or work appeared to be less of an immediate concern for these students.

*"First, I will get bachelor's degree in China, and then I will consider going to Australia for postgraduate study after my graduation, which will save me more time. I have learned that if I go to Australia for further study at the present stage, I will continue my bachelor's degree study, which will take four years to study, and that is two years more than China."*

*“I had the idea of going overseas, to get used to the western teaching curriculum, and then decide whether to do further study in Australia or not. After we finish studying this course, if we want to choose some interconnected majors from Australia, our course will give us some credit. This means that to take the same degree, the students will take longer than the students who studied this course.”*

*“I plan to do an internship after graduation. You will know about the foreign market and gain the knowledge if you study the Chinese-Australian cooperative course. I will inherit my family business after I finish my internship and improve my education.”*

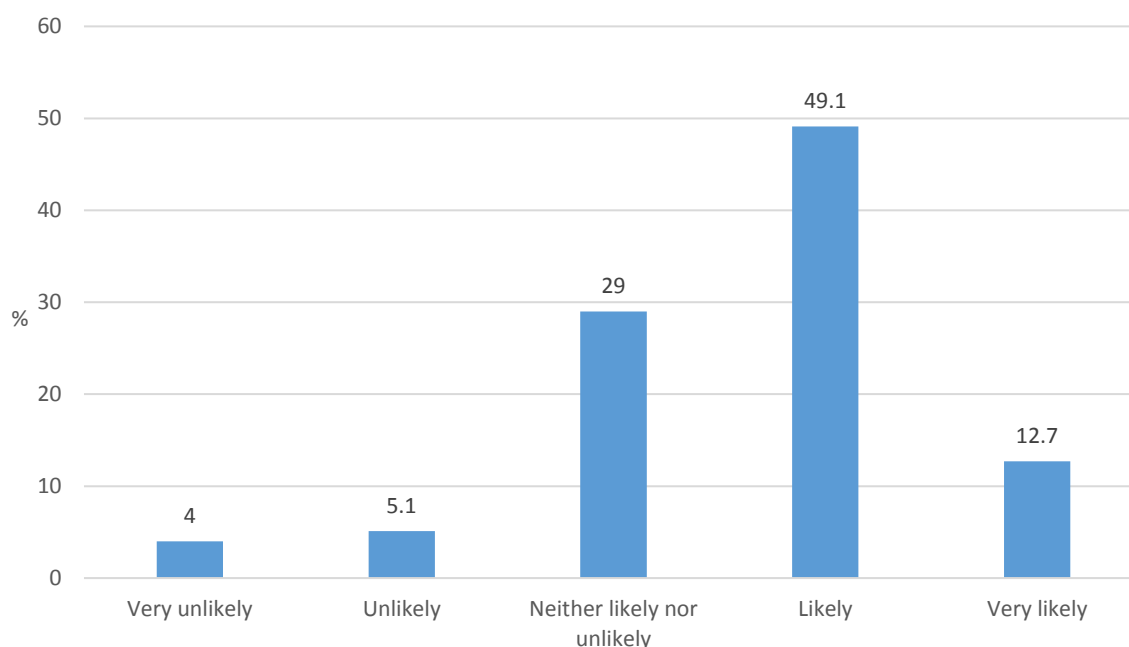
### 3.6.1. Likelihood of recommending the course upon completion

Interestingly, students spoke highly of the course and appeared satisfied with its structure, content and delivery. However, they appeared hesitant to recommend the course. With some probing, it was identified that this was largely because students wanted to take into consideration the circumstances of their peers prior to recommending the course to them.

Almost two-thirds are likely or very likely to recommend an Australian VET provider (Figures 3.6). However, their decision to recommend or not depends on the proficiency of their peers (i.e. English skills) and their family circumstances (i.e. affordability).

*“It should be based on the financial situation of their families. I would recommend that he study in this school, because learning from different perspectives, you may gain a lot.”*

*“Based on my acceptance of this course, I will recommend it to some people. I would prefer to recommend it to someone who has good family circumstances, and who also has a certain English foundation. He will feel like it’s impossible to listen to the foreign teachers if his English is not good, so I won’t recommend it to those students whose English is not good.”*



**Figure 3.6: How likely are you to recommend a course with an Australian training organisation?**

(n = 524)

## 4. Discussion

The results of the quantitative data analysis (collected via the online survey) and qualitative data analysis (collected via the focus groups) reveal a set of common themes for ongoing discussion with the VET sector and its stakeholders.

As shown in the analysis of the Total VET Activity dataset, three-quarters of program enrolments are for students under 25 years of age. Most are not yet employed and studying full-time in classroom-based learning. For the Sino-Australian joint programs in China, these programs are predominantly with Victorian TAFE providers. Ongoing work is required, however, to improve the quality and completeness of these administrative data to ensure they meet the needs of the sector and its stakeholders.

The analysis of primary data revealed three overarching sets of findings: (1) information and influences; (2) anticipated benefits of completing an international VET course at home; and (3) challenges and opportunities.

### 4.1. Information and influencers

The results reinforce the importance of targeting and tailoring information to reach the student at the points at which they are about to engage with Australian training programs. Two-thirds enrolled because the school or college recommended the course. This suggests that most students make their decision as to whether to do a joint or international program *after* they have engaged with a college.

Unsurprisingly for the younger cohort, parent(s) or family members were rated by the students as playing an important role. Nevertheless, students also rated highly the importance of trusted information about the course, particularly in the areas of: (1) costs and affordability; (2) language of instruction (i.e. English); (3) outcomes (i.e. employment); and (4) pathways into higher level qualifications.

### 4.2. Anticipated benefits of completing an international VET course at home

Students perceive a range of benefits and advantages to participating in and completing an international program:

1. Graduate with two qualifications – one Australian and one from the local provider.
2. Opportunities to improve English-language proficiency.
3. An international qualification creates a point-of-difference in an increasingly competitive job market.
4. Opportunities to learn about foreign cultures and international perspectives.
5. Pathways to further education and training in China and overseas.
6. Learning through a different and distinctive approach to training.
7. Access to systems and technologies not available in local alternatives.

The results indicate that these students are most certain that their course: (1) Provides them with English language skills that make them more employable; (2) Gives them access to foreign cultures; and (3) Provides more opportunities to work overseas. Students were less sure – but did not disagree – that: the Australian training organisation teaching my course is well-regarded (57.7% disagree); Australian qualifications are well-regarded (57.8% agree); and international qualifications are well-regarded (62.7% agree).

With some probing, it was interesting that these responses were not necessarily a reflection on students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the quality of their training program. Rather, it may reflect a lack of objective information on which to base such an opinion. Similarly, the survey revealed that students could not be *as sure* about the overall quality of the training organisation, Australian qualifications or any international qualifications, as they were about the direct benefits to them as individuals or as a collective group.

A summary of the findings from the online survey and focus groups is included in Figure 4.1 below.

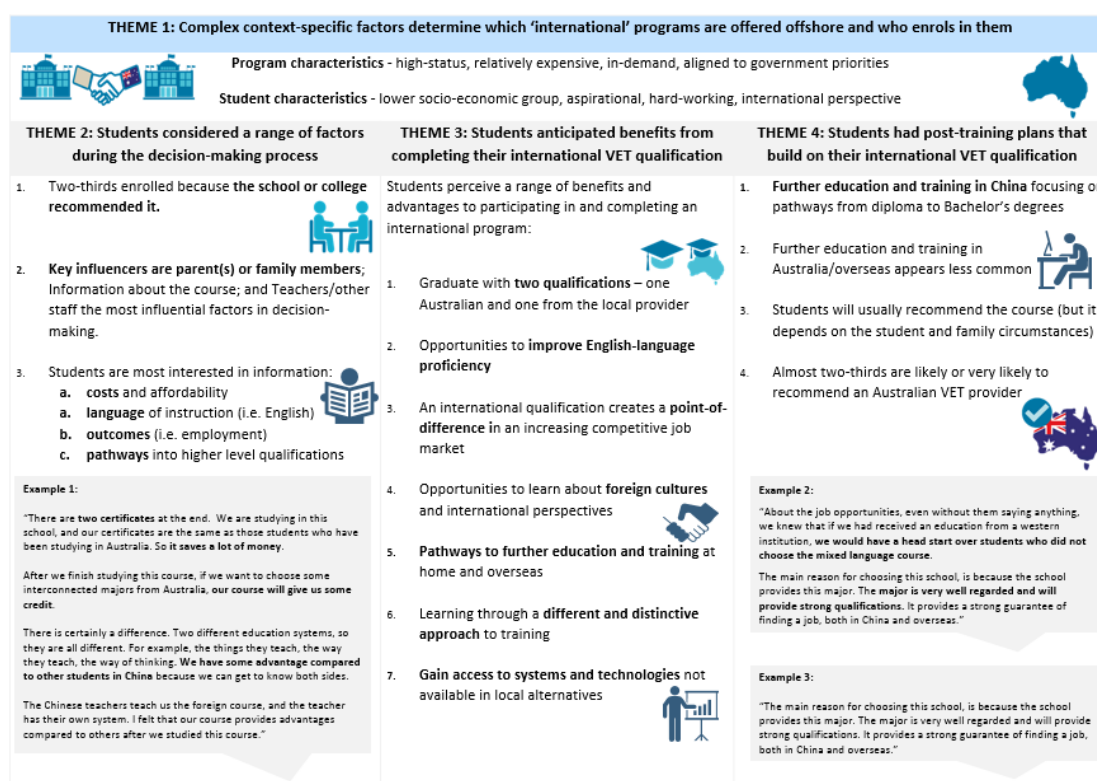


Figure 4.1: Summary of key findings

### 4.3. Challenges and opportunities

**English language proficiency** is recognised as an issue. Australian providers and their partnering colleges take very seriously the role of improving English language proficiency and giving students the best chance of completing their course.

In China, students, teachers and administrators suggested Australia could offer **scholarship opportunities** to study overseas for students, short-term exchange programs and/or support internships in Australian companies. Similarly, there was an interest among teachers and administrators in hosting Australian students in China to assist with promoting a program.

Students suggested that **providing targeted information earlier**, within schools, may help to raise awareness about the international programs. This appears consistent with the finding that students may not hear about the 'international majors' until after they arrive at college. For example, there was an interest in more information about VET training providers in Australia, and the range of VET offerings that are available in Australia.

Once at college, students explained that they would welcome **trusted information** and practical examples on the pathways, courses and training organisations that operate overseas, including in Australia. This suggests that the pathway to complete further study overseas is not clear and that it's difficult to have a clear picture when studying at home.

## 5. Conclusions

The project contributes a set of survey and focus group questionnaires as well as broadly-representative results from one of the largest Australian providers of offshore VET. However, more work is required to continue building the evidence base.

**What this research shows is that most students are enrolled in the international program because their school or college recommended it to them.** Two-thirds enrolled in the international major (i.e. the international/Australian training program) because the school or college recommended it. Unsurprisingly, parent(s) or family members were rated highly by the students as playing an important role.

**It shows that students enrolled in Australian offshore VET use and trust information but are looking for more information on outcomes and pathways.** Students rated highly the importance of trusted information about the course, particularly in the areas of: (1) costs and affordability; (2) language of instruction (i.e. English); (3) outcomes (i.e. employment); and (4) pathways into higher level qualifications. Information on costs is particularly important. In terms of gaps, students stated that they were seeking more information on pathways into higher level qualifications at home and overseas after they complete the Australian VET qualification.

The students ACER spoke with identified a set of **benefits to completing an international VET course at home**

1. Graduate with two qualifications – one Australian and one from the local provider.
2. Opportunities to improve English-language proficiency.
3. An international qualification creates a point-of-difference in an increasingly competitive job market.
4. Opportunities to learn about foreign cultures and international perspectives.
5. Pathways to further education and training in China and overseas.
6. Learning through a different and distinctive approach to training.
7. Access to systems and technologies not available in local alternatives.

**The research shows that post-training plans tend to focus on further education, training and employment options.** The three highest rated reasons for doing training were employment related: (1) **To get a job** in my home country; (2) **To get a better job or promotion**; and (3) **I wanted extra skills for my job**. Post-training plans also included aspirations to undertake **further education and training**, possibly an undergraduate degree.

**Finally, most students would recommend their Australian VET course to their peers.** Almost two-thirds are likely or very likely to recommend an Australian VET provider. However, their decision to recommend or not depends on the proficiency of their peers (i.e. English skills) and their family circumstances (i.e. affordability).

Looking forward, future work could focus on improving the evidence base on **post-training pathways and outcomes** from completing an international VET program overseas, and more specifically, an *Australian* VET program overseas. It could also give greater consideration to the diversity of VET programs, particularly those delivered in industry-based and less traditional learning environments.

These findings represent a new contribution to the evidence base. However, the survey and focus group data represent **only one large provider**. A more comprehensive picture of the population would require more active engagement from the sector.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Literature review

In summary, the review of the research literature identified four significant themes:

1. There is a **lack of research literature on the experiences of students** enrolled in vocational education and training programs with a foreign institution.
2. Internationally, there is a **lack of standard and consistent definitions and terminology** relating to offshore VET programs.
3. The **push-pull factors** influencing 'onshore' international students may overlap with, but are distinct from, those influencing students enrolled in an international qualification 'offshore' at home.
4. The motivations of students enrolling with foreign providers in their home country often involves: **(a) a comparison of local and foreign qualifications and (b) the perceived benefits arising from completing one or both qualifications (i.e. improved employability, improved English language proficiency).**

The research literature on the experiences of offshore VET students is limited. Knowledge gaps include the: (1) changing character and the global scale of, and demand for, TNE and Australia's potential future role; (2) graduate destinations of our offshore students; and (3) comparative academic outcomes for offshore students and the long-term impact of their Australian qualification (Murray et al 2011). Further highlighting the lack of conceptual groundwork on this subject, Tran & Dempsey (2017) argue that:

*"... little has been written about the synergies and contestation over the conceptualization, purpose, nature, and effects of processes and practices of internationalization in the VET sector across different countries and continents."*

In practice, Tran & Dempsey (2017) also argue that 'little is known about whether and how VET institutes, teachers, and students across different continents have been prepared to engage in this internationalisation discourse and respond to the demand of internationalisation and transnational workforce mobility' (p.4).

This review of the literature focuses on two specific knowledge gaps of most relevance to the project: (1) defining offshore VET; and (2) factors influencing student decision-making.

#### Defining offshore VET

VET is a diverse and complex sector. In many ways, it becomes more diverse and complex in an international context. The research literature suggests that defining 'offshore vocational education and training' or 'transnational education' is not a simple task. Murray *et al.* (2011, p.24) stated that "there is no globally accepted standard set of classifications of types [sic] of Transnational Education".

For statistical purposes, the NCVER report *'Delivery of VET offshore by public providers'* defines VET programs as:

*"...programs leading to an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualification in the VET sector (award programs) and non-award programs delivered to students located in another country (and who are not normally based in Australia)"* (NCVER, 2015, p.10).

Unless noted otherwise, this research project draws on the NCVER definition to include award and non-award programs.

## Factors influencing international student decision-making

Much of the research on the experiences of international students focuses on ‘globally mobile’ students who travel to enrol ‘onshore’ with a host country. In Australia, the Productivity Commission (2015) identified a set of decision-making factors from the literature: (1) the **quality** of educational institutions, their reputations and course offerings; (2) the **language of instruction**; (3) student **visa policy** settings; (4) presence of **support networks**; (5) **costs and affordability**, such as the cost of living in the destination country, tuition fees and visa fees; (6) ability to exercise **work rights** during and after completion of their course; (7) **distance** from their home country; (8) **wellbeing and safety** in the destination country; (9) the returns to investment; and (10); a range of ‘other’ factors such as **geographical, trade or historical links**.

In a report on the ‘*State of Current Research in International Education*’, Murray et al (2011) identified a set of reasons why international students have traditionally chosen to study onshore in Australia: (1) **Improved chances of employment** with an Australian qualification; (2) **High quality** of Australia’s education institutions and a **flexible system of education**; (3) **Proximity to many major source markets** in the Asia Pacific region; (4) **Affordability of programs** on offer, which are either **unavailable or inaccessible through home country** institutions; (5) **Accessibility of programs** on offer, which are either unavailable or inaccessible through home country institutions; (6) **Potential for migration**, after completion of an Australian qualification; (7) **Impact of word of mouth recommendations**; (8) **Strength of the Australian economy**, generating good short-term and long-term employment; and (9) a **multicultural, safe, welcoming community**.

Deloitte Access Economics has produced two papers, one for the Queensland Government (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016a) and one for the South Australian Government (2016b). Each includes a literature review that usefully outlines the findings from the literature on three key student decision drivers: (1) **accessibility** (cost/price, accessibility, proximity); (2) **experience** (studying, social/community participation, safety, working during studies); and (3) **outcomes** (quality of education, post-study employability and migration prospects).

While helpful, these describe the motivations and experiences of students who are studying *away* from, rather than at, home.

### Factors influencing decisions to study with a foreign provider at home

The British Council’s Education Intelligence Unit’s ‘*Portrait of a Transnational Education Student*’ is based on more than 160,000 student responses from 2007 until September 2012<sup>1</sup> (British Council, 2012). The research found that students involved in transnational education – defined as learning in a different country from where the degree-awarding institution is based – are less concerned about the awarding institution’s reputation and more about a flexible learning environment and a close fit in terms of subjects available for study.

The survey also found that students intending to study for a TNE degree valued the practicality of combining study with employment above the reputation, brand or ranking of the awarding institution. The report states that:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ei.britishcouncil.org/educationintelligence/student-insight-tne> The survey did not include students at international branch campuses but included overseas twinning programmes, online courses delivered transnationally, and dual or joint degrees.

*“This runs contrary to popular belief that the awarding institution’s rank and reputation are what primarily attract students. This isn’t to say that students do not care about brand; it is simply not the most important factor.”*

These students, many of whom were employed at the same time, were particularly interested in niche subjects, those that they could not study in their own countries, and which fitted in closely with their career plans. Zainab Malik, research manager for the British Council in Hong Kong, told University World News in 2012 that “...a big part of why students chose TNE over a local institution is the course itself. They choose TNE [courses] not because they provide them with more options but because they fit in exactly with what they want to pursue”. According to the Institute of International Education:

*“When it comes to gathering information on overseas study options, Chinese students visit university fairs and use online resources such as chat forums, blogs, institutional websites, the Chinese Ministry of Education website and word of mouth. Many students also attend agent promotions, although there has been a growing recognition that these can be limited in the options they present...”*

*...Chinese students and parents are heavily influenced by institutional rankings, including the QS World University, the Shanghai Jiaotong University and U.S. News and World Report rankings, where they examine which country hosts the highest number of top institutions. In many cases, it is the parents who have the final say as to which country and which institution the student should apply.” (WES, 2011)*

From a **system perspective**, the availability of international courses are contingent on a range of other factors, including the policy settings in which the training occurs. For example, Ziguras (2013) identified a set of common restrictions on transnational provision and, by extension, to the choices available to transnational students: (1) **Price controls on tuition fees**, either on establishment or on changes, makes programs less viable over time; (2) **Limitation on number of partnerships**, e.g. limits on number of approvals, moratoriums on new applications; (3) **Needs tests** – only granting approvals in fields and locations where local provision is insufficient; (4) **More onerous QA** than local providers; and (5) **Loans or subsidies not available** for foreign programs.

In a report on ‘*The Changing Fortunes of Australian Transnational Higher Education*’, Banks et al (2010) identified a series of drivers and barriers to development and expansion of TNE from the students’ perspective.

#### Drivers and barriers to TNE

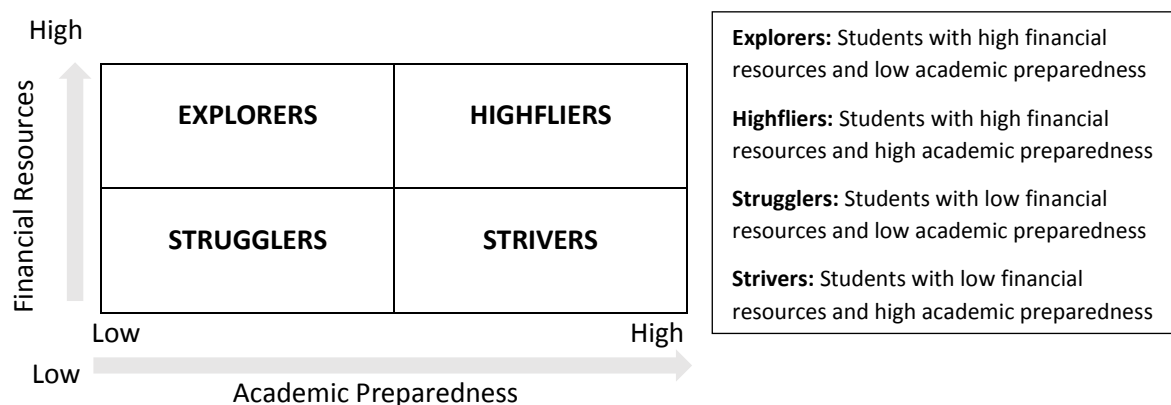
Drivers for pursuing TNE	Barriers to establishing/ expanding TNE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor access to quality tertiary education at home</li> <li>• Desire for affordable quality foreign education</li> <li>• Course not available at local institutions</li> <li>• Desire to study part time- option not available at local institutions</li> <li>• Cheaper compared to studying abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of poorer quality of transnational programmes compared to local programmes</li> <li>• Perceptions of poorer quality of transnational programmes compared to onshore on-campus programmes</li> <li>• Perceptions of poor quality local partner</li> <li>• Improved access to quality programmes at local providers</li> <li>• Perceptions of poor recognition of qualifications</li> <li>• Limited portability of qualifications</li> <li>• Limited programme choices</li> <li>• Unable to meet English language proficiency requirements</li> </ul>

Source: Banks et al (2010)

From a **provider's perspective**, NMIT [now Melbourne Polytechnic] identified a series of benefits of Transnational Education (TNE)<sup>2</sup>. NMIT stated that drivers for entering international partnerships, may include: (1) the opportunity to **expand international networks**; (2) build on **international profile**; (3) **exchange ideas and practices**; (4) **improve the quality** of their programs; (5) **increase graduate opportunities and mobility** experiences for students; (6) **gain access to new markets and funding**; and (7) increase opportunities for **staff development** and **expanding teachers' international experiences** (NMIT, n.d.).

A report on *'Not All International Students Are the Same: Understanding Segments, Mapping Behavior'* (WES, 2012) developed a framework based on 'four segments of international students' on the basis of two factors: (1) academic preparedness and (2) financial resources. Based on their responses, students are categorised as: 'explorers' (high financial resources and low academic preparedness), 'highfliers' (high financial resources and high academic preparedness), 'strugglers' (low financial resources and low academic preparedness) and 'strivers' (low financial resources and high academic preparedness).

#### Four segments of international students



Source: WES (2012) *'Not All International Students Are the Same: Understanding Segments, Mapping Behavior'*

<sup>2</sup> *'The role Victoria can play in the provision of vocational education and training in the Asian region and the experiences of NMIT [now Melbourne Polytechnic] – the opportunities and challenges'*



## Appendix B: Models of offshore VET

Stakeholders advised that there is a wide variety of offshore VET delivery methods. In general terms, programs tend to be categorised into the following models:

- **Partnering** – the Australian VET provider delivers the program through an offshore partner;
- **Full delivery** – the Australian VET provider maintains complete ownership and control of the award;
- **Franchising** – the Australian VET provider authorises another to offer the program;
- **Branch campus** – the Australian VET provider establishes a campus offshore; and
- **Distance learning** – the Australian VET provider uses online, blended or mixed learning models to deliver the program (see Chen, 2015; TAFE Directors Australia 2014).

The majority, 88.1 per cent (NCVER, 2015), of VET offshore training in 2014 is delivered through this partnering model of delivery. VET providers partner with schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and community organisations in around 40 countries to deliver both accredited (award and non-award) and non-accredited training. Some examples of the activities undertaken by Australian training providers offshore are described below.

### **Box A: Summary findings from total VET students and courses 2017 (NCVER, 2018)**

The key findings from the most recent NCVER survey were:

1. Around 192 offshore VET programs were delivered in 43 countries.
2. There were 36,765 VET offshore program enrolments in 2017.
3. The majority of program enrolments were provided in China (57%) down from 67% in 2016.
4. The majority (92%) of offshore VET program enrolments were with public providers with 62 per cent of these within public providers in Victoria.
5. Management and Commerce was the most popular field of education (45%) of the total VET offshore programs.
6. Most students enrolled in VET offshore programs were aged 24 years or less (70%).
7. The overall gender balance is relatively equal, with slightly more males (55%) than females (45%).

*Source: NCVER (2018). Australian vocational education and training statistics: total VET students and courses 2017 (offshore).*